

# Organ donation and religious beliefs



A guide to organ donation  
and Hindu beliefs

# Organ donation

## Organ donation

Organ donation is the gift of an organ to help someone who needs a transplant. Thousands of people's lives across the UK are saved or improved each year by organ transplants. But every day across the UK someone dies waiting for an organ transplant.

Organs that can be donated by people who have died include the heart, lungs, kidneys, liver, pancreas and small bowel. Tissue such as skin, bone, heart valves and corneas can also be used to help others. Living donation of a single kidney or part of a liver is also possible.

## Why is it important to think about donating organs?

With medical advances it is now possible to use transplanted organs and tissues to enhance the life chances of those suffering from a range of terminal conditions such as kidney, liver and heart failure. More people than before now suffer from these conditions and some ethnic

groups seem to be more affected than others.

The person in need of an organ today may be a stranger, but tomorrow that person could be someone you know and love. So please take the time to decide whether you want to be an organ donor, record that decision on the NHS Organ Donor Register, then tell your family.

## Family involvement

Families play an important role in organ donation in all areas of the UK, regardless of whether an opt in or opt out system is in place.

If you die in circumstances where you could be an organ donor, a specialist organ donation nurse would check the NHS Organ Donor Register to see if you had registered your decision, and speak to your next of kin to discuss whether you wanted to be a donor. The voice of your family is critical to what happens. So, whatever your decision, it's important they know what you want. This will make it easier for them to honour your decision.

## When can organ donation take place?

Doctors and other healthcare staff are committed to doing everything possible to save a patient's life. Organ donation is only considered once all attempts to save life have failed and after death has been confirmed by doctors who are entirely independent of the transplant team.

Most donated organs in the UK come from people who die from a severe brain injury, and who are on a ventilator in an intensive care unit. The brain injury will have damaged the vital centres in the brain stem which are essential for life. Doctors call this confirmation of death using neurological criteria, also known as 'brain stem death'. This is not the same as being in a coma or 'vegetative state'. Tests are carried out by two senior doctors, who are independent of the transplant team, on two different occasions, following strict national guidance.

When death is confirmed using neurological criteria, the patient will still be on a ventilator (a machine that pushes air into the lungs and supports the circulation of blood around the body). This prevents the organs from losing the oxygen-rich blood supply, which is necessary for a healthier transplant outcome.

Organs can also be donated from people, who, with their family's agreement, are having life-sustaining intensive care treatment withdrawn. If the heart stops and circulation ceases soon after, death will be confirmed and donation can occur. This is known as 'donation after circulatory death'.

## Care and respect

The removal of organs and tissues is carried out with the greatest care and respect. The family can see the body afterwards and staff can contact a chaplain or local religious leader if the family wishes.



**Bharat Kakkad donated both kidneys, his corneas and other tissue after his sudden death.**

**His wife and two sons agreed to organ donation because they felt helping others was part of Bharat's nature, and in line with his beliefs and faith system as a Hindu, in particular the tradition of Sewa.**

# Hinduism and organ donation

There are many references that support the concept of organ donation in Hindu scriptures. Daan is the original word in Sanskrit for donation meaning selfless giving. In the list of the ten Niyamas (virtuous acts) Daan comes third.

*“Giving the gift of life – or helping others to live – is viewed as a form of ‘daan’ or donation in Hinduism. Destiny or fate does not mean you don’t seek treatment if you are ill. There is nothing wrong with accepting an organ donation of any kind.”*

Sadhu Yogvivekdas, Head Sadhu, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London

*“Of all the things that it is possible to donate, to donate your own body is infinitely more worthwhile.”*

*The Manusmriti*

Life after death is a strong belief of Hindus and is part of an ongoing process of rebirth. The law of Karma decides which way the soul will go in the next life. The Bhagavad Gita describes the mortal body and the immortal soul in a simple way like the relationship of clothes to a body:

*“As a person discards the old worn out clothes to put on new ones, the eternal soul discards the old body on death and takes re-birth into a new one.”*

*Bhagavad Gita, chapter 2:22*

Scientific and medical treatises (Charaka and Sushruta Samhita) form an important part of the Vedas. Sage Charaka deals with internal medicine while Sage Sushruta includes features of organ and limb transplants:

***“According to Hindu religion, the word charity (Seva) has deep meaning in that donating a part of your body to give a life to another person is the highest form of charity (Seva) you can participate in during and after life. Nothing in the religion is beyond that. The word charity (Seva) is elaborated in Gitaji, Vedas and Upanishads.”***

*Mahendrabhai Pandya, Head Priest of Jalaram Mandir in Leicester and past Chairman of the Association of Hindu Priests*

***“Hindus accumulate good Karma by selfless deeds and what better Karmic reward than to donate the body parts, especially on death when they are of no use to us, which can help others to live a better life - a Hindu tradition embedded in***

***our scripture as evidently even in ancient India the Sage Rishi Shushruta practised ‘transplant surgery’ with donated limbs and organs, likewise.”***

*Anil Bhanot OBE, Founding Member and Director of Hindu Council UK*

***“I strongly believe that Organ Donation is the best donation any human can give.”***

*Mrs Trupti Patel, President Hindu Forum of Britain*

Information on Hinduism is available from [www.bbc.co.uk/religion](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion)

The Jain and Hindu Organ Donation Steering Group (JHOD) works hard to educate people within the Hindu and Jain communities about organ donation. The group has created resources for the communities and supports community groups nationally in their efforts to promote organ donation.

**Twitter @JHOD\_UK**  
**[www.facebook.com/jhoduuk](http://www.facebook.com/jhoduuk)**

For further information about JHOD, please contact its Chair, Kirit Modi  
**[kiritmodi1@hotmail.com](mailto:kiritmodi1@hotmail.com)**

# Making your choice

## How do I become a donor?

If you want to donate some or all of your organs or tissue after your death, the best way to ensure your family know what you want and honour your decision is to register as a donor on the NHS Organ Donor Register and to tell your family what you have decided. You can also record on the register whether your faith/belief is important and should be considered as part of the donation discussion.

## What if I don't want to donate?

If you don't want to donate, it is important to register this decision on the NHS Organ Donor Register and to tell your family.

Don't 'opt out' of donation if you are happy to donate some organs or tissue but not others. Instead, register as an organ donor and select the organs or tissue you would like to donate.

## What if I want to nominate someone to make the donation decision?

There is a form available to download from [organdonation.nhs.uk](http://organdonation.nhs.uk) which enables you to nominate someone else to make the donation decision for you. You will need to complete the form and send it back. Please note that whether or not you can legally nominate a representative to make the decision for you depends on where you live in the UK.

To find out more and to register your decision, whatever it is, visit [organdonation.nhs.uk](http://organdonation.nhs.uk) or call **0300 123 23 23**.

To find out more about organ  
and tissue donation, visit  
**[organdonation.nhs.uk](https://organdonation.nhs.uk)**